

**Wednesday 11/25/20**

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For The First Time, Scientists Confirm Ghostly Neutrino Particles Are Produced in Sun  
by [Mary F.](#)

Neutrinos are neutral, subatomic, “ghostly” particles with a mass close to zero. The mass of neutrino is much smaller than any other known elementary particle. Solar neutrinos are created in the sun during the process of nuclear fusion, when two or more atomic nuclei combine to form different atomic nuclei and subatomic particles.

In [new research](#) published Wednesday in the journal Nature, scientists revealed that they have detected neutrinos in the sun. Neutrinos can be traced to a carbon-nitrogen-oxygen fusion known as the CNO cycle, which is a process of stellar nucleosynthesis.

This is a process in which elements are created within stars through the combination of protons and neutrons. The findings confirm a theoretical prediction from the 1930s that the CNO cycle is the process most stars use to fuse hydrogen into helium.

“It’s really a breakthrough for solar and stellar physics,” said Gioacchino Ranucci of the Italian National Institute for Nuclear Physics (INFN), one of the researchers on the project, [told NBC News](#).

Almost all stars, including the sun, release energy by fusing hydrogen into helium. In the sun’s case, 99% of the energy released comes from proton-proton fusion, which releases beryllium, lithium and boron, before they are broken down into helium.

The researchers used the Borexino detector at the INFN’s Gran Sasso particle physics laboratory in central Italy to confirm their findings.

The detector is the world’s most radio-pure liquid scintillator calorimeter. A scintillation counter is an instrument used to detect and measure ionizing radiation, while a calorimeter is an apparatus used to measure the amount of heat involved in a chemical reaction.

Although the Borexino detector has long been measuring neutrinos from the sun’s proton-proton chain reaction, detecting CNO neutrinos is a challenging process, with only seven neutrinos detected a day. However, the latest study confirmed that neutrinos are produced in the CNO cycle in the sun with a high statistical significance.

“This is the first evidence that the CNO cycle is at work in the sun and the stars,” Ranucci pointed out, NBC reported.

Gabriel Orebi Gann, a particle physicist at the University of California, Berkeley, also called the study’s findings “a major milestone.”

“This discovery takes us a step closer to understanding the composition of the core of our sun, and the formation of heavy stars,” Gann explained.

Researchers have also theorized that neutrinos from the Big Bang, the leading explanation for the formation of the universe that posits it began as a single point before expanding, could be used to explain the universe’s invisible “dark matter.” Dark matter refers to any substance that interacts through gravity with stars, planets and other visible matter. Dark matter is theorized to

exist based on observed gravitational forces in the universe, but it does not interact with visible light or other electromagnetic radiation.

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UN Releases \$25M For Domestic Abuse Prevention as Violence Against Women Surges Amid Pandemic  
by [Mary F.](#)

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is a United Nations (UN) agency with the goal of improving reproductive and maternal health worldwide. UN Women is another UN entity working for the empowerment of women.

This week, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock released \$25 million from the UN's emergency funds to help support women-led organizations that respond to gender-based violence, a [Wednesday news release reveals](#).

The funding will go toward UNFPA and UN Women, which will channel at least 30% of those funds to other organizations that prevent violence against women and children and help provide survivors medical care, family planning, legal advice and mental health services and counseling. "The COVID-19 pandemic helped reveal the full extent of gender inequality while creating a set of circumstances that threaten to reverse the limited progress that has been made," Lowcock said in the news release.

UNFPA will receive \$17 million, while UN Women will receive \$8 million.

"It's time to say 'enough' to gender-based violence and to prioritize the rights and needs of women and girls in humanitarian crises," UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem said in the release.

The announcement to fund such organizations came at the start of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, an international campaign that aims to challenge violence against women and girls. The campaign runs from November 25, the date of International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to December 10, which is Human Rights Day.

"The high levels of gender-based violence that women and girls experience, especially in countries that are in crisis and in need of humanitarian assistance, remains one of the greatest injustices in our world," UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka said in the release.

"Putting these resources into the hands of women-led organizations that respond to gender-based violence in humanitarian settings is essential to address the needs of survivors and to strengthen systems to prevent and promote accountability, so that we finally end this scourge," she added.

The funding comes from the United Nations' Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), a humanitarian fund established by the United Nations General Assembly to provide humanitarian assistance to those affected by underfunded crises.



UN Women has referred to increased physical or sexual violence against women during the COVID-19 crisis as a "[shadow pandemic](#)." According to the organization's data from before the pandemic began, [1 in 3 women](#) globally experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. However, evidence shows that calls to domestic violence helplines in many countries have increased since the pandemic broke out, as women have been forced to remain with their abusers in lockdown. In some countries, resources have also been diverted from initiatives that support women facing violence to COVID-19 relief.

In July, the nongovernmental organization Human Rights Watch urged governments to do more to prevent violence against women during COVID-19 lockdowns.

"Authorities everywhere should be worried about reports of rising gender-based violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns," Amanda Klasing, acting co-director of women's rights at Human Rights Watch, [said in a news release](#). "Reports of increases in gender-based violence mask a larger risk that women in the shadows or margins of society will suffer violence without remedy or reprieve if governments don't act quickly."

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Israeli Military Told to Prepare for Possible US Strike on Iran Ahead of Trump Exit - Report by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Tensions with Iran under the Trump administration came to a head after the US withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 and began to reimpose sanctions previously lifted under the nuclear deal. Relations worsened even further after US strikes in January killed Quds Force commander Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani.

Citing senior Israeli officials, [Axios reported Wednesday](#) that service members of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were recently instructed to prepare for a potential US strike on Iran before US President Donald Trump is expected to leave office in January.

Officials with knowledge of the instruction explained to the outlet that the IDF was informed by the Israeli government of the change not because it had confirmed knowledge of an imminent US strike, but rather because Israeli officials felt that if such an attack unfolded, they would not have sufficient time to be fully prepared.

Unidentified senior sources further noted that they felt Trump's presumed final months in the White House would be "a very sensitive period," noting that preparedness measures were also linked to a possible attack by Iran against Israel either directly or through Iranian proxies in the Middle East.

Tensions between Iran and Israel have remained heated for years; however, most recently, Israeli forces [carried out retaliatory strikes on Iranian targets in Syria](#) after its troops detected roadside bombs in the Golan Heights. Israeli officials claimed that the bombs were planted by members of the Syrian Armed Forces and the Iranian Quds Force, and that the act was a violation of Israel's sovereignty.

Earlier this month, H.R. McMaster, a retired US Army lieutenant general who previously served as a national security adviser in the Trump administration, also hinted that Israel could itself opt to [launch a strike on Iran in the event that Trump leaves office](#).

The Axios report also comes over a week after [the New York Times reported](#) that Trump had considered ordering a military strike on against Iran's main nuclear site in Natanz, where the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that the country's uranium stockpile was 12 times larger than limits imposed under the JCPOA. The US [withdrew from the accord](#) in 2018.

The Times noted that Trump was ultimately "dissuaded" from a possible strike after senior advisers warned that a "broader conflict" could develop as a result. Although it is believed that a strike is no longer a viable option for the Trump administration, Ali Rabiei, a spokesperson for the Iranian government, stated that any action against the nation would be met with a "[crushing response](#)."

Last week, Hossein Dehghan, an adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, [told the Associated Press](#) that a US attack on Iran would prompt a "full-fledged war" in the region. He added, "Definitely, the United States, the region and the world cannot stand such a comprehensive crisis."

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Video: Biden Says 'Grim Season of Division' Will Give Way to Unity in Thanksgiving Address by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday in which Americans gather together with their families, presumed US President-elect Joe Biden addressed the nation in an effort to deliver a message of hope and unity as much of the country continues to struggle with effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaking from Wilmington, Delaware, Biden urged the American public to resist surrendering to the "fatigue" of the pandemic while promising that better times are ahead as the nation works to curb the spread of the deadly respiratory disease.

"Looking back over our history, you see that it's been in the most difficult circumstances that the soul of our nation has been forged, and now we find ourselves again facing a long, hard winter. We fought nearly a yearlong battle with a virus that has devastated this nation, brought us pain, loss and frustration and has cost so many lives," Biden told viewers. "It's divided us, angered us, set us against one another."

"We need to remember we're at war with the virus, not with one another, not with each other. This is the moment where we need to steel our spines, redouble our efforts and recommit ourselves to the fight. ... We're all in this together," he underscored.

Adhering to Preventative COVID-19 Measures Part of 'Patriotic Duty'

Days ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [issued new guidance](#), calling for Americans to stay put and instead opt for virtual celebrations so as to not inadvertently accelerate the spread of COVID-19.



Biden stated that it was Americans' "patriotic duty" to follow preventative measures promoted by health professionals, noting that his family would also be hosting separate Thanksgiving dinners.

"I know how hard it is to forgo family traditions, but it's so very important," he said. "If it means wearing a mask, keeping social distance, limiting the size of any group we're in - until we have a vaccine, these will be the most effective tools to combat the virus."

At present, there are three vaccine candidates being hailed by health officials as potentially effective against COVID-19, of which only one has been officially submitted for review to the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Following the review, the FDA is set to decide on whether or not to grant an emergency use authorization for an approved vaccine candidate.

The latest forecasts suggest that an approved vaccine may undergo mass distribution starting in late December to early January, with the first doses being given to first responders and those most vulnerable to COVID-19.

"It's gonna take time. Don't let yourself surrender to the fatigue. America is not gonna lose this war. We will get our lives back ... this will not last forever," Biden reiterated. "I believe that this grim season of division, demonization is going to give way to a year of light and of unity. ... because America is a nation not of adversaries but of neighbors. "

US Democracy Tested, Learned Americans 'Up to the Task'

In light of the contentious presidential election being held in the middle of a pandemic, the projected president-elect also indicated Americans "must be thankful for democracy," as the nation proved that it was still able to conduct the vote.

Figures suggest that the 2020 presidential election saw more votes cast than in any other US election in history. Shattering the total from former US President Barack Obama's 2008 win, Biden earned [some 80 million votes](#).

"Our democracy was tested this year, and what we learned was this: the people of this nation are up to the task," Biden said. "In America, we have full and fair and free elections, and then we honor the results."

"The people of this nation and the laws of this land won't stand for anything else," he added. Although the [General Services Administration has initiated](#) the first steps of the transition from the Trump administration to a Biden presidency, US President Donald Trump has not officially conceded the election. Trump has vowed to continue his legal challenges in battleground states, alleging rampant voter fraud.

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Video: US Lawmaker Says Flynn Pardon Will Show Trump 'Acting Like an Organized Crime Figure'

by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Michael Flynn, a retired US Army lieutenant general who served as a national security adviser under the Trump administration, pleaded guilty in 2017 to lying to the FBI about contacts with

the Russian ambassador to the US. Following media reports earlier this week, US President Donald Trump on Wednesday issued a full pardon for Flynn.

US Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA), who also heads the House Intelligence Committee, remarked during a Wednesday interview that a pardon issued to Flynn would show Trump “acting like an organized crime figure.”

“It would send the message that at least as far as President Trump is concerned, if you lie on his behalf, if you cover up for him, he will reward you. He will protect you - but only if he thinks it’s in his interest,” the congressman told CNN’s John Berman.

“There are others that lied for him that he’s not going to extend that kind of service to, but, frankly it reflects so ill on our democracy, on the United States. Imagine what people around the world think when we have a president who’s acting like an organized crime figure.”

However, Schiff also stated that Trump’s actions should not come as too much of a surprise, as “this is who Donald Trump is, it’s who he was on the way into the presidency, and it will be exactly who he is on his last days of the presidency.”

Schiff’s commentary on a Flynn pardon came a few hours before Trump [made the official announcement via Twitter](#) amid mass speculation on the matter. “I know you will now have a truly fantastic Thanksgiving,” the president wrote to Flynn and his family.

Flynn served less than a month under the Trump administration, ultimately resigning from his post and becoming one of many officials who came under fire during special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 US presidential election. Although Flynn initially pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI, he later withdrew his plea and argued that he’d been set up by the bureau [after a federal judge unsealed documents](#) that included a [handwritten note from an FBI official](#) that discussed the possibility of forcing Flynn to lie during an interview. The US Department of Justice [moved to drop the case against Flynn in May](#); however, the proceedings have remained under review in federal court.

Trump has [repeatedly discredited investigations](#) into Flynn and claimed that the case against his former national security adviser was a “scam” that “should never be allowed to happen to a citizen of the United States again.” Earlier this year, [Trump tweeted out](#) that he had been “strongly considering” a pardon for Flynn.

[According to the New York Times](#), more pardons are expected to be handed out to a slew of individuals in the presumed final weeks of Trump’s presidency, possibly including former Trump campaign advisers Rick Gates and George Papadopoulos.

Incidentally, Flynn’s pardon came just one day after Trump [issued pardons to a pair of turkeys](#) ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday as part of a longstanding White House tradition.

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Trump Backs Out of Pennsylvania Hearing After Campaign Adviser Tests Positive for COVID-19 by [Evan Craighead](#)



The Pennsylvania public hearing, organized by Republican lawmakers of the state, was slated to be the US president's first trip outside the Washington, DC, area since the November 3 election.

US President Donald Trump nixed Wednesday plans to join lawyer Rudy Giuliani and GOP state lawmakers in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, to examine allegations of widespread "irregularities" in the presidential election, [according to The Hill](#).

Pennsylvania on Tuesday [certified Democratic nominee Joe Biden](#) as the winner of the state in the presidential election.

CNN White House Correspondent Kaitlan Collins [highlighted in a tweet](#) that the US president's cancellation came shortly after Trump campaign adviser Boris Epshteyn announced that he tested positive for COVID-19.

"I am experiencing mild symptoms, and am following all appropriate protocols, including quarantining and contact tracing," he tweeted Wednesday.

Epshteyn was recently seen alongside Giuliani and other members of Trump's legal team during a news conference last week. He was also in close quarters with Giuliani during a [November 22 radio interview](#).

Giuliani, on the other hand, appeared at the Pennsylvania Senate Majority Policy Committee's public hearing that began at 12:30 p.m. local time on Wednesday.

"It's in everyone's interest to have a full vetting of election irregularities and fraud," Giuliani said in a [Tuesday statement](#) released by the Trump-Pence reelection campaign. "And the only way to do this is with public hearings, complete with witnesses, videos, pictures and other evidence of illegalities from the November 3rd election."

The release highlighted similar public hearings are scheduled to take place with the state legislatures of Arizona and Michigan on November 30 and December 1, respectively.

"We are pleased that the State Legislatures in Pennsylvania, Arizona and Michigan will be convening hearings to examine the November 3rd presidential election," said Jenna Ellis, senior legal adviser for the Trump campaign and personal attorney to the US president.

"There were serious irregularities, we have proof of fraud in a number of states, and it is important for all Americans to have faith in our electoral process. All we have wanted from the outset is to count every legal vote and discount every illegal vote."

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EPA: No Additional 'Financial Assurance Requirements' Needed for US Toxic Waste Cleanups by [Evan Craighead](#)

Critics of the Trump administration's decision have argued the previous Obama-era regulations created financial assurance requirements that focused on polluters most likely to have toxic or hazardous waste releases.

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced in a [November 25 news release](#) that it had finalized its "financial assurance requirements for the Electric Power Generation,

Transmission and Distribution; Petroleum and Coal Products Manufacturing; and Chemical Manufacturing industries."

The Wednesday memo noted that the EPA, following a "detailed analysis," found the financial risks regarding the cleanup of "possible hazardous substance releases" were already addressed by existing state and federal requirements.

Therefore, the agency declared that no additional requirements were necessary, according to the release.

"EPA has found that existing environmental regulations and modern industry practices are sufficient to mitigate any risks inherent in these industries," detailed EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler.

The decision refers to Section 108(b) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act ([CERCLA](#)) - also known as Superfund. The associated federal program allows the EPA to establish requirements for industrial facilities to cover the financial burden of potential hazardous substance releases.

[According to The Hill](#), the Wednesday decision pushed back against Obama administration rules which said that major polluters in the industry should be prepared to cover possible waste-related events. The outlet noted many of the 1,300 Superfund sites on the US cleanup list have become "orphaned" by now-bankrupt companies, meaning there are no guarantees in place that cleanup will occur.

"This is all so basic. It would just require that those companies have proof that if there is a release or spill of hazardous substances that there would be funds to clean it up so it's not left on the taxpayers," Lisa Evans, an attorney with the environmental nonprofit Earthjustice, told The Hill.

She noted the previous rules from the Obama administration targeted "polluters that had the most likelihood of creating releases."

This approach requires many companies to seek accident insurance that calls for additional facility requirements, like a containment area to ensure the potential spill would not travel far from the area in which it occurred.

"They will come and look at a facility and require that industry has certain safeguards in place so they won't have a spill," Evans explained. "Industry will have to operate more safely if it has to get and maintain financial assurance — that's just the way the world works."

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#### CIA Officer Killed in Somalia Last Weekend - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer has died from an injury sustained during a mission in Somalia last weekend, CNN reported citing a former senior US administration official familiar with the matter.

The report on Wednesday said the CIA officer was a former US Navy Seal, but the identity of the officer has not been made public.



Earlier on Wednesday, the US Defense Department's inspector General said in a report that al-Shabab Islamist militia continued attacks in East Africa as US forces revised plans to transition security responsibility to Somalia, because Somali forces fell short of development "milestones."

The Trump administration plans to withdraw more than 600 troops from the country soon.

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#### Trump Tells Pennsylvania Republicans 'We Have to Turn Election Over'

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said in a phone call to public hearings in Pennsylvania that he has sufficient evidence to reclaim election victory and just needs a judge without political opinion to listen properly to his arguments.

"We have to turn the election over. There is no doubt we have all the evidence, we have all the affidavits, we have everything," Trump said Wednesday. "All we need is to have some judge listen to it properly without having a political opinion or another kind of a problem."

Trump authorized the General Services Administration to allow a formal transition to his Democratic rival Joe Biden while continuing to dispute the November 3 election result and saying he will not concede to election fraud.

"This was election that we won easily, we won it by a lot," Trump said. "The whole world is watching us, the whole world is watching the United States of America and can't let them get away with it."

Trump reiterated that he is unwilling to put up with the election defeat.

"It would be easier for me to stay 'Oh, let's worry about four years from now.' No, this election was lost by the Democrats. They cheated, it was a fraudulent election," he said.

The public hearing was held in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, by the Republicans from the state legislature to discuss with Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani alleged irregularities.

Pennsylvania has already certified results and awarded 20 electoral votes to Biden, declared the President-elect by major US media outlets.

## GIULIANI ACCUSES

Giuliani repeated allegations that there are almost 700,000 votes in Pennsylvania, that the Trump campaign deems illegal and wants them be disqualified. Biden leads Trump in the state, which played a key role in determining the outcome of the election, by a margin of 81,660 votes. "We have calculated and evidence will show that there were 682,770 mail-in ballots that were entered into your votes in just Allegheny County [with the seat in Pittsburgh] and Philadelphia that were not observed by any single Republican," Giuliani said. "Those ballots could have all been for Joe Biden. They could have all been for someone else. They could have all been for someone else. They could have had no identifying data. They could have been from the same person. There could have been multiples of them. There could have been no name on them. We have no idea if that is true."

Giuliani suggested that lawmakers try to subpoena all outer envelopes from mail-in ballots, but doubted that they were still kept. "But in any event under the law of your state which is set by you those ballots are illegal," he said.

The claim was shot down by a conservative Republican judge who on Saturday dismissed the Trump legal team's arguments as an inept and unsubstantiated attempt to disenfranchise 7 million voters.

"The judge mistakenly in his opinion said that we want to disenfranchise 6 million people. We don't want to disenfranchise anyone. We want to disqualify 682,000 votes so that 74 million people are not disenfranchised. Because that's what happened by the cheating that went on here," Giuliani responded.

Among other grievances the lawyer alleged that thousands ballots in Pennsylvania were cast by dead people and said that his team is looking for definitive proof. "We are checking the records the records in the cemeteries around Philadelphia," he said. "Your election because of these two counties and maybe one another is a sham, is a disgrace."

Giuliani brought several witnesses to the hearing who publicly testified to various alleged election issues. One of the them, a Philadelphia attorney and a volunteer certified Republican canvass observer Justin Kweder, claimed that ballots in the city were processed at a distance of ten to more than 200 feet away from watchers corralled behind a fence.

"Due the distance of the workers from the erected fences it was impossible for me or any observer to see what the workers were doing with any type of specificity. The observers were not able to challenge any decision or determination being made about the processing of these mail-in ballots," he said. "No civilian oversight over hundreds of thousands of mail-in ballots, zero opportunity for observers to observe, challenge or inspect the mail-ins being opened. I find this to be an issue and to be irregular."

In his testimony Kweder also alleged that multiple ballots proved unreadable for scanning machines and were manually duplicated without proper oversight.

"The Philadelphia Board of Election's solution to this problem was to give the workers who were working alone, individually, stacks of hundreds of amounted to blank mail-in ballots. And the workers individually were to fill in the correct highlighted ovals with dark pen. No observation," he claimed. "The workers did this double re-creation work for hours before the observers realized what was going on."



Kweder said that he was told that there were more than 5,000 of these damaged ballots, but the actual number was unknown and could be "much higher."

Biden has been projected to win the November 3 election by every major US media outlet and several of the most crucial battleground states have already officially certified Biden's victory.

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#### **ANALYSIS - Biden's Cabinet Likely to Get US Mired in More 'Forever Wars'**

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Presumptive President-Elect Joe Biden's top cabinet selections, deeply tied to the defense industry, will likely ensure US troops get stuck in more intractable military conflicts, analysts told Sputnik.

On Tuesday, Biden announced his selection of Antony Blinken as secretary of state, Jake Sullivan as national security adviser, Avril Haines as Director of National Intelligence and Alejandro Mayorkas to lead the Department of Homeland Security.

#### **FOREVER WARS**

Biden has repeatedly vowed to end US involvement in "forever wars" like those in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, experts say his first cabinet picks make clear he may fall into the trap of igniting the very types of wars he has discredited.

"I would argue surrounding yourself with Tony Blinken, who supported the Iraq war, and Jake Sullivan, Hillary Clinton's adviser - Clinton also supported the Iraq War - sends the opposite message that he isn't in fact committed to ending 'forever wars' because he's surrounding himself with the exact same people who championed one of these 'forever wars,'" Paris-based analyst Mariamne Everett told Sputnik.

Everett also argued that during the Obama administration their poor handling of the US exit from Iraq led to even more chaos than the initial occupation and insurgency.

In addition, Blinken looked certain to further cement his lifelong support for Israel, making it highly unlikely to regain the confidence of the Palestinians, which incumbent President Donald Trump totally forfeited, Everett observed.

Blinken, in addition to backing the arming of extremists in Syria, has also supported the intervention in Libya, the Iraq war, and the Saudi campaign in Yemen.

#### **PAYING BACK DEFENSE INDUSTRY**

Reports have surfaced claiming that Biden is considering tapping Pentagon veteran Michelle Flournoy as the first woman in US history to serve as secretary of defense.

Historian and political commentator Dan Lazare said all of these named and potential picks champion unregulated defense spending that delight the giant corporations.

"Blinken, Sullivan, and Flournoy... are not only hawks but incompetent hawks whose policies resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths and the destruction of entire societies, yet didn't advance US interests one bit," Lazare told Sputnik.

None of these historic failures had damaged their reputations or earnings in the slightest, Lazare continued.

"They were rewarded with cushy defense-related jobs at places like WestExec Advisors, Booz Allen Hamilton, and the Boston Consulting Group. Now... they're back in office thanks to the Washington revolving door," Lazare added.

Biden's picks, he said, will undoubtedly make the same mistakes over again with the same dreadful consequences.

"The whole thing is appalling," Lazare concluded.

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#### **Biden Says Hospitals in US at Risk of Being Overwhelmed Amid Rise in COVID-19 Cases**

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Presumed US President-elect Joe Biden said on Wednesday that hospitals in the United States face the possibility of being overwhelmed because of a rise in novel coronavirus cases.

"Our country is in the middle of a dramatic spike in cases. We are now averaging 160,000 new cases a day," Biden said on Wednesday. "Many local health systems are at risk of being overwhelmed."

Earlier on Wednesday, Biden Deputy Campaign Manager and Communications Director Kate Bedingfield told reporters that the Biden transition team's COVID-19 Advisory Board will begin briefings with the Trump administration.

The experts, which include David Kessler, Vivek Murthy and Marcella Nunez-Smith, will be focusing on the Trump administration's plan for a vaccine distribution, testing and the supply chain of personal protective equipment, Bedingfield said.

The Advisory Board said its members are being provided with good information and look forward to learning more about Operation Warp Speed - the Trump administration program tasked with addressing coronavirus vaccines and therapeutics.

On Monday, US President Donald Trump authorized the General Services Administration to initiate a formal transition to the Biden team while continuing to dispute the results of the November 3 election, saying he is the winner and refusing to concede defeat.

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#### **US Lawmakers Request Study of COVID-19 Risk in Air Travel - Letter**

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - US House Transportation Committee Chair Peter DeFazio and Aviation Subcommittee Chair Rick Larsen sent a letter to Comptroller General



Gene Dodaro formally requesting the General Accountability Office (GAO) to undertake three studies to gauge risks of air travel during the novel coronavirus pandemic.

"The purpose of these studies is to help inform Congress about the risks of air travel during a public health crisis, better understand the Federal response that has been taken to address these risks, and to identify lessons learned that can inform future Federal legislation," the letter said on Wednesday.

The lawmakers asked the GAO for one study of recent government, academic and industry research on coronavirus transmission via air travel.

They requested a second study to identify responsibilities of state, local and federal officials, as well as airport staff and contractors in protecting passengers and crew from contagious diseases.

A third study requested would grade the aviation industry's response to the coronavirus pandemic and produce a report on lessons learned.

The lawmakers cited an earlier GAO report that found the United States has yet to develop a national aviation strategy for communicable disease outbreaks despite having signed an international aviation treaty requiring such a plan.

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Russia, Zambia to Boost Education Cooperation Despite COVID-19 Crisis - Rossotrudnichestvo

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Russia wants to expand cooperation with Zambia in the field of education despite the fact that now all students are studying online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Head of the Rossotrudnichestvo in Zambia Republic Aleksander Anisimov told Sputnik.

"We see areas for increasing cooperation with Zambia, and particularly expanding collaboration with educational institutions, and also on creative practices such as skills building in areas like business and management," Anisimov said. "Russia is not good only because it is possible to get a good quality education for free there but also because it has creative innovation potential." Anisimov underscored that the agency's main activity is education of the Zambians in Russia - the selection of the best Zambian school graduates for their further studying in Russia, as well as popularization of Russian education, and language.

"We come with that to the schools, universities, for example, offering special courses," he said. Anisimov noted that there are a lot of graduates from the Russian universities every year.

"We have quite a big quota - 150 students per year - for free education for very prestigious majors in Russia," he stated. "On this basis we are now developing a new system of cooperation on Russian language with schools and universities."

He noted that this year there were 2,000 candidates, about 20 people per seat, who applied for grants to study in Russia.

"The students have been selected, however, because of the COVID-19 pandemic they are now studying online," Anisimov shared. "We hope that they will eventually come to Russia, as they say themselves to play snowballs."

Anisimov said that overall some 6,000 Zambians graduated from the Russian universities. He also underscored that these people are immersed in the Russian culture, love it and have serious life moments connected with Russia.

"A lot of Zambian guys return with Russian wives, who represent the base of our compatriots in the country - some 300 people in Zambia," Anisimov said.

Anisimov shared that amid the pandemic and before the end of the year they will continue to work in all directions of the public diplomacy.

"For example, we have a social media club where we are trying to help the youth, companies and communities to develop their digital skills," he said. "We constantly teach Russian. Besides, in December the schools graduates take their exams. And as in March they will be applying for grants to study in Russia, in January we expect at least some hundred new students to study Russian language."

Anisimov went on to say that aside from doing the regular work at the Russian cultural center, they also do the charity work.

"These projects are more personal. For example, my wife supports women who make baskets," he explained. "For these women it's the only source of living. And my wife helps them find partners and buyers across the world. Moreover, my children are actively engaged in another project. Every weekend they go the poor neighborhood to teach writing, reading, geography and math to a group of 30 girls."

Anisimov also noted that they have recently held the very first Russian film festival, staged Pushkin's "The Blizzard (Metel)" with Zambian students acting in Russian language and now they are staging "Carnival Night," also in Russian, to mark New Year's celebrations along with songs and dances.

Anisimov concluded by saying that the cooperation between Russia and Zambia has always been positive.

"Zambian Humanism, a special philosophical social system, significantly impacted by socialist ideas was developed here during the times of President Kenneth Kaunda, which is the postcolonial time. And so, socialist ideas and the history of the Soviet Union are close to the Zambians," he said.

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Venezuela Executive Faces Charges of Laundering Bribes Through US Banks - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 25(Sputnik) - An 11-count indictment charges a dual Venezuelan-Italian citizen with bribing officials in Venezuela's state-owned oil company PDVSA and laundering proceeds of inflated contracts through US banks, the Justice Department said in a press release.



"The indictment alleges that, beginning in January 2013 and continuing through December 2017, [Natalino] D'Amato conspired with others, including officials at joint ventures between PDVSA and various foreign companies in the oil-rich Orinoco belt of Venezuela, to launder the proceeds of an illegal bribery scheme to and from bank accounts located in South Florida," the release said on Wednesday.

D'Amato was charged with one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, four counts of international money laundering, three counts of promotional money laundering, and three counts of engaging in transactions involving criminally derived property, the release also said.

The indictment claims D'Amato offered and paid bribes to numerous Venezuelan officials who worked at the PDVSA joint ventures in order to obtain highly inflated and lucrative contracts to provide goods and services to the PDVSA joint ventures, the release added.

The indictment further alleges that over the course of the conspiracy, companies controlled by D'Amato deposited about \$160 million from the PDVSA joint ventures into accounts he controlled in South Florida, and used a portion of those funds to bribe Venezuelan officials, according to the release.

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**Biden Pick for Top Diplomat Likely to Escalate US Interference in Syria - Ex-UK Envoy**

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Projected President-elect Joe Biden's administration is likely to involve the United States in more Middle East conflicts under a Department of State led by Antony Blinken, who has openly regretted Washington's failure to topple the government in Damascus, former UK ambassador to Syria Peter Ford told Sputnik.

On Tuesday, Biden announced his selection of Blinken as secretary of state and Jake Sullivan as national security adviser, along with other cabinet posts. The developments come as Russia has expressed concerns over processes unfolding in Syrian territories under US control. On Wednesday, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said separatist tendencies provoked by the external occupation are blocking attempts to restore Syria's territorial integrity.

"Blinken is on record deeply regretting that [former President Barack] Obama nixed plans for the United States to go wading into the Syrian quagmire even more than it did already, and condemning [President Donald] Trump's worthy but feeble attempts to withdraw US troops from Syria," Ford said. "The scene is set for more counter-productive US belligerence and interference in the Middle East."

Trump came under fire in both parties for trying to swiftly drawdown troops in Syria, although he authorized a few hundred personnel to stay behind to seize the country's oil. Blinken, in addition to backing the arming of extremists in Syria, has also supported the intervention in Libya, the Iraq war, and the Saudi campaign in Yemen.

Ford also said Blinken believes rejoining the Iran nuclear agreement will put the United States in a stronger position to tackle Tehran over its "destabilizing behavior."

"If this is the mindset and the objective he brings to the table with Iran, the recalibration of relations with Iran is dead in the water," Ford predicted.

Contrary to Blinken's assessments, he added, Iran had consistently played a constructive role in blocking the expansion of terrorist elements in Syria. Ford said the bigger problem is the US "destabilizing" behavior in the region "involving serial regime change maneuvers."

Ford is also worried about the policies that Sullivan, a former Hillary Clinton adviser, would join with Blinken in disastrously implementing.

"Neither of these appointments bodes well for peace in the Middle East, or probably anywhere else. Both appointees are classic products off the Washington conveyor belt of true believers in American exceptionalism and 'leadership' (i.e. domination)," he said. "Neither has ever stood for a policy or a principle that was not fashionable with the Washington establishment at the time."

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Islamic State, Al-Qaeda Threat 'Significantly Degraded' in North Africa- Pentagon Watchdog

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Violent extremist organizations (VEO) in North Africa have been significantly degraded and currently pose minimal threat to the United States' interests in the region, the US Defense Department's Inspector General said in a report.

"In North Africa, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and ISIS-Libya did not conduct any known attacks this quarter. Both VEO are significantly degraded and currently pose no threat to the US and a minimal threat to US interests in the region," a press release summarizing the report said on Wednesday.

In Libya, ceasefires between the UN-backed Government of National Accord and the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army held during the quarter, and both parties participated in UN-sponsored peace talks, the release said.

In East Africa, however, al-Shabab continued attacks as US forces to revised plans to transition security responsibility to Somalia, because Somali forces fell short of development "milestones," the release added.

In West Africa, terrorist groups were neither degraded nor contained during the quarter and continued expanding in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, according to the release.

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Trump Pardons Former National Security Advisor Flynn

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump has announced that he has granted a full pardon to his former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn.

"It is my Great Honor to announce that General Michael T. Flynn has been granted a Full Pardon," Trump said via Twitter on Wednesday.

Flynn was accused of making "false and fraudulent statements" to the FBI regarding the nature of the contacts between the Trump campaign and Russian Ambassador to the United States Sergei Kislyak amid and after the 2016 election campaign.

Flynn initially pleaded guilty to giving false statements to the FBI, but later retracted the plea after evidence emerged that the FBI framed him and demanded that all charges against him be dropped.

Flynn is the only person convicted within the investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into possible collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia. The investigation found no evidence of collusion. Russia has repeatedly denied interfering in the US political system.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik)

DIEGO MARADONA DIES

\* Argentine football legend Diego Maradona has died at the age 60, the TN broadcaster reported on Wednesday.

\* The United Nations is saddened to hear about the passing of legendary Argentine soccer player Diego Maradona, UN deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said.



## NAGORNO-KARABAKH DEVELOPMENTS

- \* The upper house of the French parliament has adopted a motion recommending that the government recognize the independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (Artsakh) in a 305-1 vote on Wednesday.
- \* Other countries, apart from Russia and Turkey, could get involved in guaranteeing the peace in Nagorno-Karabakh and controlling implementation of the ceasefire, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.
- \* Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan will be the guarantors of peace in Nagorno-Karabakh, Erdogan said.
- \* Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that Russia was not expanding its peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh although some may have such an impression.

## SYRIAN CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE'S SESSION

- \* The next session of the Syrian constitutional committee's small body will take place from November 30 to December 4 in Geneva, to be followed by meeting in January, UN Deputy Special Envoy for Syria Khawla Matar said on Wednesday.

## CAR INCIDENT AT ANGELA MERKEL'S OFFICE

- \* German police are checking the mental state of the person who drove into the gate of Chancellor Angela Merkel's office, and possible motives, a Berlin city police representative said.
- \* The person, who drove into the gate of the German chancellery, had a similar incident in 2014, spokesman for the German Interior Ministry Steve Alter said.

## RUSSIA-POLAND DISPUTES

- \* It is regrettable that Poland is turning a blind eye to conclusions about the Katyn massacre and tends to reject the reality, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday.
- \* Russia has asked Poland for a transcript of a phone conversation that late Polish President Lech Kaczynski had with his brother shortly before his plane crashed in Russia in 2010, a spokesman for the Office of the Russian Prosecutor General said.
- \* Poland does have a transcript of a phone call between Lech Kaczynski and his brother, which took place shortly before the president's plane crashed over Russia, a person involved in the investigation of the case told Sputnik on condition of anonymity.

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Acting US Defense Chief to Visit Mideast This Week to Discuss Regional Issues - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Acting US Defense Secretary Christopher Miller will visit the Middle East this week to discuss with commanders and regional partners a range of issues such as combating malign activities in the region, the Defense Department said in a press release on Wednesday.

"Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher C. Miller is visiting the Middle East for his first international trip leading the Defense Department... Acting Secretary Miller is also scheduled to meet with US commanders and host nation leaders to address security interests and priorities of countering violent extremism and combating malign activities that threaten the sovereignty and stability of the region," the release said.

Miller's visit comes amid reports that the Trump administration could strike Iran during what is presumed to be the US president's final weeks in office.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Axios news website reported citing senior Israeli officials that the Israeli military has been put on alert to prepare for the possibility of a US attack against Iran prior to January 20.

Last week, the New York Times reported that Trump asked about "available options" against an enrichment facility in Natanz to permanently derail Iran's nuclear project, but was dissuaded by his advisers, who warned the strike may escalate into a bigger war.

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## Trump Tells Pennsylvania Republicans 'We Have to Turn Election Over'

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump said in a phone call to public hearings in Pennsylvania on Wednesday that he has all evidence needed to reclaim election victory and just needs a judge without political opinion to listen properly to his arguments.

"We have to turn the election over. There is no doubt we have all the evidence, we have all the affidavits, we have everything," Trump said. "All we need is to have some judge listen to it properly without having a political opinion or another kind of a problem."

After losing several lawsuits in various states, Trump authorized to initiate a formal transition to his Democratic rival Joe Biden while continuing to dispute the validity of the November election and refusing to concede.

The public hearing was held in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, by the Republicans from the state legislature to discuss with Trump's personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani alleged irregularities. Pennsylvania has already certified results and awarded 20 electoral votes to Biden, declared the President-elect by major US media outlets.

Biden has been projected to win the November 3 election by every major US media outlet and several of the most crucial battleground states have already officially certified Biden's victory.

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## Pennsylvania Governor Appeals Court Order Temporarily Blocking Vote Certification - Filing

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf and Secretary of State Kathy Boockvar have filed an appeal to the state's Supreme Court over a lower court's ruling to temporarily block the certification of presidential election results, a court filing revealed on Wednesday.

"Respondent Kathy Boockvar, in her official capacity as Secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; Respondent the Honorable Thomas W. Wolf, in his official capacity as Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and Respondent the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania submit this Jurisdictional Statement in support of their Notice of Appeal filed concurrently herewith," the court filing said.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro said the decision by the state court does not impact the certification of the results, which was done on Tuesday.

Earlier on Wednesday a Pennsylvania state court ruled that the state must halt "further action" on certification of election results and set a hearing on Friday.

The Trump campaign has filed around 40 lawsuits to derail the certification of votes in key battleground states, all of which have so far failed. Biden has been projected to win the November 3 election by every major US media outlet and several of the most crucial battleground states have officially certified Biden's victory. President Donald Trump has also agreed to allow the transition process to begin, although he still refuses to formally concede.



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**US Central Bankers Agree to Adjust Asset Purchases to Support Economy as Pandemic Worsens**

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - The US Federal Reserve needs to adjust the way it buys assets in the financial marketplace to support the US economy as fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic grows, the central bank's monthly policy meeting minutes released Wednesday showed.

"While participants judged that immediate adjustments to the pace and composition of asset purchases were not necessary, they recognized that circumstances could shift to warrant such adjustment," the Fed said in the minutes of the meeting held between November 4 and 5 by its Federal Open Market Committee. "Accordingly, participants saw the ongoing careful consideration of potential next steps for enhancing the Committee's guidance for its asset purchases as appropriate."

The minutes underscored the Fed's difficulties in managing the COVID-19 nine months into its breakout.

A recent example was the demand by outgoing Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin that the central bank return unused portion of the \$455 billion allocated to its emergency lending programs under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act set to expire at the end of the year.

Mnuchin said his decision was based on Congress' original intent when it allocated the money, that whatever unused funds be returned to Treasury.

Officials at the Fed, however, expressed surprise at Mnuchin's decision to try and claw back the funds when its lending programs were still on and while economic stress from the COVID-19 was accelerating.

Mnuchin, in his defense, said politics was not behind the decision. The treasury secretary will remain in his post until January 20, after which President-Elect Joe Biden and his administration will take over from incumbent Donald Trump's government. Mnuchin said if the Fed needed to tap the funds again, it could seek the approval of the next treasury secretary - a process that further slows the central bank's lending processes amid the pandemic.

In the minutes issued Wednesday, the Fed said that while the current stance of monetary policy remained appropriate, both employment and inflation fell well short of the FOMC's goals. Uncertainty about the course of the virus and the outlook for the economy, in contrast, remained very elevated, it said.

"Participants viewed the resurgence of COVID-19 cases in the United States and abroad as a downside risk to the recovery; a few participants noted that diminished odds for further significant fiscal support also increased downside risks and added to uncertainty about the economic outlook," the minutes added.

The US economy grew by a record 33.1 percent in the third quarter, after shrinking by 31.4 percent in the previous three months and 5 percent in the first quarter. In 2019, the economy grew by 4.1 percent.

Despite the third quarter rebound, the US economic outlook remains dire with a rash of new coronavirus infections reported across a nation with 12.6 million COVID-19 cases since January and almost 260,000 fatalities related to that. US COVID-19 hospitalizations have hit daily record highs of above 100,000 in recent weeks, even as vaccine developments for the virus have shown promise.

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**Study Shows COVID-19 Antibody Drop in 94% of People Within 60 Days - US Health Dept.**

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Ninety-four percent of the 156 front-line health care workers who tested positive for the novel coronavirus had fewer antibodies 60 days later, included 28 percent who tested negative, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said in a report on Wednesday.

"In this study of 156 frontline U.S. health care personnel who received positive SARS-CoV-2 [novel coronavirus] antibody test results in spring 2020 and returned for follow-up testing approximately 60 days later, 146 (93.6 percent) had a decline in antibody levels between baseline and follow-up, and 44 (28.2 percent) had complete seroreversion, i.e., a decline of antibody to levels below the threshold for positivity," the report said.

The results suggest that antibody tests - as opposed to tests for the disease itself - at a single time point is likely to underestimate the number of persons with previous coronavirus infections, and a negative antibody test result might not reliably exclude prior infection," the report said. The report also suggests that an optimal window for donations of convalescent plasma to treat the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) occurs shortly after recovery because of a quick decline in antibody levels.

The duration of the immunity presents a key unknown with several vaccines expected to become available within months. However the report noted that memory B-cell and T-cell responses in the immune system might reduce the severity of illness with repeat exposure or infection, even in the absence of antibodies.

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**US Denies Permit for Gold, Copper Mine in Southwest Alaska - Army Corps of Engineers**

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - The United States has denied providing a permit for the controversial Pebble copper and gold mine in the state of Alaska, which may threat to the

state's wild nature, the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) said in a statement on Wednesday.

"Today, the US Army Corps of Engineers - Alaska District issued a record of decision that denies the Pebble Limited Partnership's permit application to develop a copper-molybdenum-gold mine in southwest Alaska under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act," the statement said as quoted by local media. The decision brought an end to the years-long dispute over creating a giant production project near the world's largest wild sockeye salmon fishery.

"USACE determined that the applicant's plan for the discharge of fill material does not comply with Clean Water Act guidelines and concluded that the proposed project is contrary to the public interest," the statement said.

The assessment was based on in-depth analysis of project alternatives and examination for technical information, the statement added.

The previous Obama administration blocked the project but in May of 2017, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Pebble Limited agreed to settle by reaching an agreement, which gave the company 30 months to submit permits for the mine.

A group of local environmental organizations, businesses and native Alaskans fought for more than a decade to prevent mining as the area's waterways feed into Bristol Bay, which is a home of a valuable fishery.

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**US Attacks Russia's Energy Suppliers to Gain Advantage in Hydrocarbon Market - Antonov**

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - The United States' statements blaming Russian energy suppliers of poor environmental standards are yet another attempt to gain competitive advantage in the hydrocarbon market, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Wednesday.

Antonov's comments come in response to the statement made by US Assistant Secretary for Energy Resources Francis Fannon who cited the Carbon Disclosure Project saying Gazprom ranks as one of the worst performers regarding the environment.

"Attempts to accuse our energy suppliers of weak environmental standards in comparison with the American ones do not hold water," Antonov said. "We see this as another attempt to gain additional competitive advantages in the hydrocarbon market."

Antonov emphasized that Gazprom's activities comply with international standards and the company regularly improves its technologies. He explained that methane emissions along the entire production chain in 2019 amounted to 0.02 percent of the volume of recoverable gas during production, 0.29 percent during transportation, and 0.03 percent during underground storage.

"This is in line with the world's best practices for stopping methane leaks," Antonov said.

"Gazprom is doing this work in cooperation with leading global corporations - partners within the



framework of the international initiative 'Guidelines for Reducing Methan Emissions in the Natural Gas Supply Chain' launched in November 2017."

Antonov also said the Nord Stream 2 and the Turkish Stream projects are being implemented in strict accordance with the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment.

"Hydrocarbon footprint, i.e. CO2 emissions from the transportation of 'blue fuel' through these pipelines will be more than three times lower compared to the supply of liquefied natural gas from the United States," he said. "This is achieved by using the most modern technologies."

Antonov also said that the use of Russian natural gas, which is an efficient and environmentally friendly fuel, contributes to the achievement of United Nations sustainable development goals and the fulfillment of obligations under the Paris Climate Accord.

Its use contributes to the low-carbon development by economies of countries who are importing Russian raw materials, Antonov added.

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US Trial Compares 2 COVID-19 Drugs in Combination With Remdesivir – Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) – The US began enrolling hospitalized COVID-19 patients requiring supplemental oxygen in a trial of two separate treatments, both involving remdesivir, the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) said in a press release on Wednesday.

"One group will receive both dexamethasone, a corticosteroid available as a generic drug, and remdesivir, a broad-spectrum antiviral," the release said. "The second group will receive remdesivir and baricitinib, a modulator of inflammation that is approved by FDA [Food and Drug Administration] to treat certain adult patients with moderate to severe rheumatoid arthritis." NIAID began enrolling hospitalized patients in the trial, with plans to include up to 1,500 patients at 100 sites in the US and other countries to compare the efficacy of the treatments, both of which have received emergency use authorization from the FDA, the release said.

The trial aims to determine whether baricitinib or dexamethasone, when administered with remdesivir, is more effective at preventing hospitalized adults on supplemental oxygen from progressing to requiring mechanical ventilation or death, or if they are similar, the release added.

To date, dexamethasone and baricitinib are the only two anti-inflammatory therapies that have demonstrated efficacy for the treatment of hospitalized adults with COVID-19 in large, randomized clinical trials, according to the release.

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US Arrests Army Veteran for Sending Money to Terrorists in Syria - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - A former US soldier faces charges of sending money and advising the Syrian terrorist group Nusra Front following her arrest on Wednesday, the Justice Department said in a press release.

"Maria Bell, a/k/a 'Maria Sue Bell,' 53, of Hopatcong, New Jersey, is charged by complaint with one count of knowingly concealing the provision of material support or resources to a designated foreign terrorist organization," the release said.

Bell is scheduled to appear by videoconference before US Magistrate Judge Cathy Waldor on Wednesday afternoon, the release said.

Beginning in February of 2017, Bell used encrypted applications to communicate with and provide advice to fighters based in Syria who were members of the Nusra Front, also known by other aliases, including Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, the release explained.

Bell also provided money to one self-identified member of the terror group based in Syria, identified in the complaint as "User 1," the release said.

The group is widely considered a Syrian branch of al Qaeda terror group, which is banned in Russia.

In thousands of messages to the group's fighters, Bell cited her professional experience - including her specialized weapons training while on active duty in the US Army and Army National Guard - to provide guidance concerning operational security and firearms purchases, according to the release.

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**Biden to Announce More Cabinet Picks Next Week - Communications Director**

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Presumed President-elect Joe Biden will announce more cabinet picks next week, Biden Deputy Campaign Manager and Communications Director Kate Bedingfield told reporters on Wednesday.

"Next week, you can anticipate that we will be rolling additional names of people President-elect Biden will nominate to serve in key positions in his administration," Bedingfield said.

Among the cabinet announcements, Biden will present his economic team, Bedingfield added.

On Monday, US President Donald Trump authorized the General Services Administration to initiate a formal transition to the Biden team while continuing to dispute results of the November 3 presidential election and refusing to concede defeat by saying he would never accept election fraud.

Biden has already tapped Antony Blinken for the position Secretary of State, Avril Haines for the Director of National Intelligence post, among others.

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#### Biden Transition Team to Begin COVID-19 Briefings With Trump Officials Wednesday

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Presumed President-elect Joe Biden transition team's COVID-19 Advisory Board will begin briefings with the Trump administration on Wednesday, Biden Deputy Campaign Manager and Communications Director Kate Bedingfield told reporters on Wednesday.

"[Advisory Board experts] have tremendous experience and perspective in this space ... and looking forward to this meeting today and to these additional briefings moving forward," Bedingfield said on Wednesday.

The experts, which include David Kessler, Vivek Murthy and Marcella Nunez-Smith, will be focusing on the Trump administration's plan for a vaccine distribution, testing and the supply chain of personal protective equipment, she said.

The Advisory Board believes they are being provided with good information and look forward to learning more about Operation Warp Speed - the Trump administration program tasked with addressing coronavirus vaccines and therapeutics.

On Monday, US President Donald Trump authorized the General Services Administration to initiate a formal transition to the Biden team while continuing to dispute the results of the November 3 election and refusing to concede defeat.

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#### Fauci Says in Contact With Biden' Transition Team

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) – National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Anthony Fauci said on Wednesday that he had preliminary contacts with presumed President-elect Joe Biden's transition team.

"Not with the President-elect personally, but with his staff," Fauci said in an interview with ABC.

"Nothing substantive in the sense of plans, but just touching base with me, telling me 'We are going to be talking about this very soon now that the transition is in process.'"

Fauci is a member of the Trump administration's Coronavirus Task Force to coordinate efforts to combat the novel coronavirus.

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#### US Sanctions Libyan Kaniyat Militia, Its Leader - Treasury



WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - The United States has introduced sanctions against Libya's Kaniyat militia and its leader, the US Department of the Treasury said on Wednesday. The sanctions target the Kaniyat militia, also known as the 7th and 9th brigade, and its leader Mohamed Al-Kani, the Treasury Department said.

The Treasury Department explained that the Kaniyat militia had exerted control over Libya's town of Tarhouna and surrounding areas in the past several years and has detained, tortured and murdered civilians there.

"In April 2019, the Kaniyat militia changed allegiances from Libya's recognized Government of National Accord (GNA), to the self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA), providing the LNA a foothold near Tripoli during its offensive against the Libyan capital," it said.

In June, GNA-aligned forces re-entered Tarhouna and discovered at least 11 mass graves containing the bodies of civilians previously detained by the Kaniyat militia and some of the deceased appeared to have been tortured, burned or buried alive, the Treasury Department said.

In addition, the Kaniyat militia is responsible for hundreds of summary executions at Tarhouna prison, numerous forced disappearances, as well as the displacement of entire families from Tarhouna, the Treasury Department added.

Libya has been split between two rival administrations since its longtime leader Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown and murdered in 2011. The western part of the country is controlled by the GNA headed by Fayez al-Sarraj, while the eastern part is controlled by LNA's Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar.

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#### Global Aviation Group Urges Nations to Back Sustainable Jet Fuel to Cut Emissions

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Support for sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) by governments could enable global airlines to achieve a target to cut emissions to half of 2005 levels in the next 30 years, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said in a press release on Wednesday.

"The cost of SAF is too high and supplies too limited," IATA Director General Alexandre de Juniac said in the release. "Putting economic stimulus funds behind the development of a large-scale, competitive SAF market would be a triple win - creating jobs, fighting climate change and sustainably connecting the world."

SAF, which is made from used cooking oil and non-food crops, now costs two to four times more than fossil fuel. IATA estimates that government subsidies could boost supplies to a tipping point where SAF could be supplied at competitive prices, the release said.

The fuel reduces carbon admissions by up to 80 percent, has been used on more than 300,000 flights, requires no engine modifications and could be blended with conventional jet kerosene as supplies increase, the release added.

In a related development, IATA said it had set up an exchange for airlines to buy and sell carbon offset credits to help meet emission reduction commitments.

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#### **Biden to Receive 1st Presidential Daily Briefing on Monday - Official**

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Joe Biden is expected to receive his first presidential daily briefing from the incumbent administration on November 30, Biden's transition team advisor Jen Psaki said on Wednesday.

"We are working with the DNI and the White House on the President-elect and the Vice President-elect receiving the PDB. We expect the first briefing to take place on Monday," Psaki said during an online briefing.

The President's Daily Briefing is a daily rundown of threats and intelligence developments compiled by the national security community for the US leadership.

US President Donald Trump authorized on Monday the General Services Administration to initiate a formal transition to his Democratic rival while continuing to dispute the validity of the November election and refusing to concede.

Psaki said that sharing classified information with Biden's team has already begun.

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#### **US to Impose Iran-Related Sanctions on 4 Russian, Iranian Entities - Reports**

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - The US government will impose Iran-related sanctions on four Russian and Iranian entities, Reuters reported on Wednesday citing Special Envoy for Iran Elliott Abrams.

Elliott accused the entities in China and Russia of engaging in activities to promote Iran's missile program and said the United States will continue to exert pressure on Iran by imposing more sanction in the coming weeks, the report said.

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#### **US Sanctions Libyan Kaniyat Militia, Its Leader - Treasury**

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#### US Forces, NATO Wage Multiple Exercises Throughout European Theater - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - US forces along with NATO allies and partner nations conducted multiple military drills and live fire exercises across Europe this month, from Sweden in the north to Greece, the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday.

"Each of these exercises and operations dramatically demonstrated our collective conventional and special operations abilities to defend every region across Europe," US European Command (EUCOM) planning chief Cap. Jeffery Rathbun said in the release.

In Sweden, US Special Operations Command Europe trained alongside the Swedish Armed Forces and Home Guard. Backed by US Navy destroyer Ross, a 16-day exercise focused on possible Baltic Sea regional contingencies, the release said.

Rapid Falcon is a seven-day exercise with Romanian forces featured the US military's long-range HIMARS rockets in a rapid deployment drill, the release also said.

Greece hosted a 16-day exercise that ends Friday, with 250 specialized military members from four nations - Germany, Greece, Netherlands and the United Nations, the release added.

Along with the simultaneous live fire exercises, EUCOM hosted a virtual 12-day strategy conference with 13 NATO allies and nine partner nations, according to the release.

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#### US COVID-19 Deaths Top 260,000 - Johns Hopkins University

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - The number of US deaths caused by the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has exceeded 260,000, John Hopkins University data revealed.

The United States has confirmed more than 12.6 million cases of COVID-19 since the first infection was detected in late January, the data showed on Wednesday. The death toll now stands at 260,065, according to the data.

It took the US a single week to add another 10,000 to its coronavirus death tally.

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#### US Economy Up 33.1 % In Third Quarter, Second Reading Shows - Commerce Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - The US economy grew by 33.1 percent between in the third quarter, the Commerce Department said Wednesday in a second reading that left its previous growth estimates for the July to October period unchanged.

"Real gross domestic product (GDP) increased at an annual rate of 33.1 percent in the third quarter of 2020," the department's Bureau of Economic Analysis said in a statement. The Q3 GDP was the highest ever attained by the United States for a three-month period. It comes after the second quarter plunge of 31.4 percent — which also marks the steepest drop ever for a three-month period, due to business lockdowns forced by the COVID-19 pandemic between April and June.

Despite the third quarter rebound, the US economic outlook remains dire with a rash of new coronavirus infections reported across a nation with 12.6 million COVID-19 cases since January and almost 260,000 fatalities related to that. US COVID-19 hospitalizations have hit daily record highs of above 100,000 in recent weeks, even as vaccine developments for the virus have shown promise.

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#### US Jobless Claims Up 2nd Week in Row as COVID-19 Continues to Bite - Labor Dept.

WASHINGTON, November 26 (Sputnik) - Some 778,000 Americans filed for jobless benefits last week, up about 4 percent from the previous week and higher for a second straight week, Labor Department data showed on Thursday, as the US job market continued to struggle nine months into the coronavirus pandemic.

"In the week ending November 21, the advance figure for seasonally adjusted initial claims was 778,000," the department said in a news release. It revised upward claims in the previous week to November 14 to 748,000 from 742,000. That raised the latest week's claims by 30,000, or about 4 percent.

Claims also rose in the previous week to November 14, rising by 32,000 and breaking four weeks of declines prior to that.

Continuous claims for the latest week in review, however, showed fewer filings from the previous week. Some 6.07 million Americans were on continuous claims for the week ended November 21, versus 6.37 million during the week to November 14. The unemployment rate for last week, meanwhile, stood at 4.1 percent, down 0.2 percentage point from the previous week. The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April, at the height of lockdowns forced by the COVID-19. A rebound of 2.5 million jobs was logged in May and 4.8 million in June, before the recovery began slowing. For all of September, there were just 661,000 jobs added.

The US economy grew by a record 33.1 percent in the third quarter, after shrinking by 31.4 percent in the previous three months and 5 percent in the first quarter. In 2019, the economy grew by 4.1 percent.



Despite the rebound, the economic outlook for the United States remains dire with a rash of new coronavirus infections reported across a nation with 12.6 million COVID-19 cases since January and almost 260,000 fatalities. Hospitalization has also hit daily record highs of above 100,000 in recent weeks, even as vaccine development efforts have been showing promise.

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US Weekly Jobless Claims Rise to 778,000 for Week to Nov 21 - Labor Dept.

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Israeli Army Instructed To Prepare for Possible US Strike on Iran - Reports

WASHINGTON, November 25 (Sputnik) - Israel's government believes it is possible that US President Donald Trump may attack Iran in his final weeks in office and has instructed the military to prepare for the eventuality, Axios news website reported on Wednesday, citing senior Israeli officials.

The Israeli government has instructed the Israeli Defense Forces to undertake preparations for what they anticipate will be a "very sensitive period ahead of projected President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration, and not because of any intelligence assessment that Trump will order such an attack, the report said.

Preparedness relates to possible Iranian retaliation against Israel, whether directly or through proxies in Syria, Gaza and Lebanon, Axios quoted Israeli officials as saying.

Last week, the New York Times reported that Trump asked about "available options" against an enrichment facility in Natanz to permanently derail Iran's nuclear project, but was dissuaded by his advisers, who warned the strike may escalate into a bigger war.